

# Department of Planning & Development



# Annual Report 2008

# Introduction



Mayor Greg Nickels

We are working to enhance Seattle's great neighborhoods and natural environment, and we are confronting global warming by reducing our greenhouse gas emissions. DPD's mission supports these efforts directly through the principles of smart growth, sustainable buildings and communities, and by creating thriving, livable neighborhoods.



Diane Sugimura

2008 remained very busy for DPD. However, by mid-year we noted a change in the number and types of permit applications and began reducing our expenditures. At the same time, we remained focused on improving our permitting services, maintaining a strong code enforcement presence in the community, continuing work on a number of significant long-range planning projects, and working with the Green Building Task Force to develop recommendations to improve building performance, lower energy bills and create green jobs.

## 2008 Highlights

- ♦ **Permitting Activity:** In 2008 DPD permitting activity continued at a high level, though signs of the downturn were apparent. In particular, applications for large new projects began to fall off. Issued permits, and the subsequent inspections and related permits, continued at relatively high rate, with a total project value of \$2.59 billion, compared to \$3.1 billion the previous year. As applications began to drop off, DPD pulled back from mandatory overtime for reviewers and the use of consultant reviewers. In addition, vacant positions were not filled. At the end of 2008, as part of the budget process, DPD eliminated 15 unfilled positions.
- ♦ **Code Compliance:** We maintained response times for complaints in spite of significant increases in the number of complaint calls. In 2008 the City collected over \$130,000 in penalties from code enforcement cases, including more than \$31,000 from an owner of multiple problem properties in a single neighborhood. That owner also demolished two seriously deteriorated houses to avoid additional penalties. Enforcement information cards were translated into six languages to broaden the community's awareness of code requirements and how to file complaints.
- ♦ **Comp Plan:** In the annual process to consider amendments to the Comprehensive Plan, the City approved changes that would allow transfer of development rights from historic properties in Pioneer Square and the International District. The amendments included a re-organized and enhanced section on tree preservation. City Council also changed the timing for reviewing annual amendments. Now, instead of scheduling a vote on amendments around the Council's annual budget deliberations in the fall, the vote will occur in March for amendment suggestions submitted by the previous May.
- ♦ **Seattle Planning Commission:** In 2008 the Commission provided their expertise by reviewing and commenting on planning initiatives such as the annual amendments to Seattle's Comprehensive Plan, the Multifamily Code update, updating the neighborhood plans, Dravus rezone, the replacement of the Alaskan Way Viaduct, and design review for Central Link Light Rail stations. It also launched a comprehensive look at how the City's policies, practices, and infrastructure investments can complement and enhance transit facilities to create thriving, walkable transit communities. The Commission also developed and successfully shepherded new comprehensive plan amendment language that strengthens the City of Seattle commitment to housing affordability, and provided advice to the Office of Housing and the City Council on the Housing Levy.
- ♦ **Seattle Design Commission:** In 2008 the Seattle Design Commission celebrated its 40th anniversary helping to shape the city's public realm. During the year the commission reviewed 79 projects with a total value of \$12.4 billion. Major projects reviewed included replacement of the Alaskan Way Viaduct and SR 520 floating bridge, Sound Transit's North Link, Capitol Hill and UW stations, Fire Station levy projects and the Cheshiahud Lake Union Loop.

# 2008 Highlights

- ♦ **Neighborhood Planning Updates:** DPD and the Department of Neighborhoods launched the first review of the city's neighborhood plans since they were first adopted in the 1990's as a key element for handling growth wisely.
- ♦ **Livable South Downtown:** The final Environmental Impact Statement and draft report were published for this major land use planning effort for the south downtown neighborhoods. Key to success will be preserving historic areas while encouraging more housing and jobs, and enhancing livability. Recommendations and legislation are scheduled for 2009.
- ♦ **South Lake Union:** Work continued on the Urban Form Study to increase housing and job potential in this rapidly transforming area of the city. Environmental review of the Study recommendations is scheduled to begin in 2009.
- ♦ **Design Review:** The Design Review Program started the year with continued high volumes similar to the previous year, until the fall of 2008. At that time Early Design Guidance applications dropped off dramatically, ending the year with a total of 89 compared to 124, 122 and 137 for the previous three years. Updating the Multifamily and Commercial Design Guidelines continued with an emphasis on reducing the number of guidelines and adding some new guidance such as sustainable principles. At the Mayor's request, work was started to expand and revise the Administrative Design Review process so that townhouse projects of three units or more would be subject to Design Review.
- ♦ **Green Building:** In 2008, 17 commercial and multi-family projects became LEED certified and 727 units of single and multi-family housing were certified as Built Green. City Green Building (CGB) partnered with the Cascadia Green Building Council to host the Transformational Lecture series concluding with a presentation at Benaroya Hall by Van Jones. Two new green remodel guides – Do-It-Yourself Home Energy Audit and Green Home Buyer – were created along with a new rainwater harvesting Client Assistance Memo. A new permitting process, Priority Green, was implemented to provide a facilitated review process for innovative deep green buildings. New code provisions were adopted to encourage the sustainable deconstruction of homes rather than demolition. CGB and the Office of Sustainability and Environment staffed the Mayor's Green Building Task Force to guide policy proposals to improve the energy efficiency for both new and existing building stock.
- ♦ **Unreinforced Masonry Buildings (URMs):** DPD began reviewing the possibility of requiring seismic retrofit of unreinforced masonry buildings. Technical and policy committees of outside experts were convened by DPD to develop recommendations. Issues under consideration include what level of retrofit to require, how long building owners would have to upgrade their buildings, and which types of URMs would be subject to the new regulations.
- ♦ **Translations and Interpretations:** DPD translated 14 of its documents into the languages spoken most frequently in the community. Translated documents included emergency hazard notices, tenant relocation packets, how to comment on proposed development, and inspectors' business cards. The department also provided interpreters at land use planning open houses in Little Saigon, South Downtown, and Northgate.
- ♦ **Technology:** DPD's IT team built an Online Coaching application to help applicants through the permitting process; initiated on-line and in-person customer surveys; posted Design Review packets on web providing easy access for the community and City departments; initiated My DPD Dashboard, allowing applicants to track their permits; and resurrected on-line Land Use Q&A.
- ♦ **It's on the Web:** DPD's web team completely overhauled the department website to be more user friendly. The improvements included a cleaner design, better organization, and easier access to DPD's three main divisions. Two new sections, Online Tools and Resources, provide quick access to DPD's web-based applications and informational resources. The redesign also includes a helpful "How Do I?" section for each division to answer the most frequently asked questions.





# Department Statistics

## Land Use & Construction

### 2008 Permits Issued by Type

Master Use	951
Building	6,556
Electrical	18,476
Boiler	626
Conveyance (elevators, escalators, and lifts)	811
Mechanical (Furnace)	3,287
Signs and Billboards	733
Side Sewer	2,984
Blanket (tenant improvements in large buildings)	267
Site Work	114
Refrigeration	671

**Total 2008 Permits Issued** **35,476**

**Total 2008 Value of Building Permits** **\$2.59 billion**

## Code Compliance

### 2008 Violation Complaints by Type

Construction	1,152
Housing	432
Noise	259
Shoreline	40
Vacant Buildings	263
Vegetation Overgrowth	1,494
Zoning	1,652
Unfit for Human Habitation	5

**Total 2008 Complaints** **5,297**

## DPD at a Glance 2008

**Budget:** \$67 million

**Staff:** 441 positions

**Meetings:**  
DPD conducted nearly 300 public meetings and events.

**Walk-ins:** 70,136  
customers visited  
DPD's offices.

**Inspections:**  
DPD conducted 141,000  
inspections.

## Contact DPD

[www.seattle.gov/dpd](http://www.seattle.gov/dpd)

City of Seattle  
Department of Planning and Development



Applicant Services Center (ASC)	(206) 684-8850
City Green Building	684-8880
Community Relations	684-8880
Code Compliance Division	615-0808
General Department Information	684-8600
Licensing & Testing	684-5174
Microfilm Library	233-5180
Office of the Director	684-8899
Planning	684-8880
Plans Routing Library (aka "Plans Routing")	684-8169
Public Resource Center (PRC)	684-8467
Review & Inspection Center (RIC) - North Team	684-8860
Review & Inspection Center (RIC) - South Team	684-8950
Side Sewer Program	684-8860
Site Development Services	684-8860
Technical Code Development	233-3892

700 Fifth Avenue, Suite 2000, P.O. Box 34019  
Seattle, WA 98124-4019

